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The Disciples' Pulpit

SERMONS OF JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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DOROTHEA L. DIX

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The Disciples' Pulpit.

Under this title there will be published once a month one of James Freeman Clarke's sermons. It is not proposed that the sermon published shall always be of most recent date; but the selection will be left to Dr. Clarke, and, so far as possible, special attention will be paid to the needs of the Post-office Missions.

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IX. Dorothea L. Dix.

GEO. H. ELLIS, *Publisher*,
141 Franklin St., Boston.

DOROTHEA L. DIX.

"This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."— MATT. xvii., 21.

I HAVE taken these words as my text in speaking of a woman who did more than any one else in our day to bring about the comfort and cure of lunatics. She used, as we shall see, the same means indicated by Jesus,— a strong religious faith and a constant self-denying devotion to this work.

It is not every distinguished person who should be commemorated after death by biography, memoir, or public discourse. A man may have been eminent, even illustrious, but in no new way. He may have had more talent or success than others, but only by being in advance of them on the same path. In such cases, we know beforehand what can be said. He may have been more successful in politics, business, professional attainment than his peers, but with the same kind of success as theirs. He has opened no new road through what was before an unknown wilderness. No new moral comes from his life. There is nothing original in the quality of his work. It merely surpasses that of others in its quantity.

But it occasionally happens that some one, perhaps less conspicuous in the public eye, has done a work which we should not allow to pass unmentioned. Especially is this the case if it has helped mankind, and shown the possibility of accomplishing something valuable which was before unknown and unsuspected. Every such life it is well to remember, well

to ask others to remember; for the recollection of it may help to increase the blessings or remove the sufferings of mankind.

One who opened such a new road was John Howard, who first roused men to see the evils of prisons and the sufferings of prisoners. Such another was Sir Samuel Romilly, the great reformer of the criminal law. Such were Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale, William Lloyd Garrison. They worked for different objects, but with the same devotion to some commanding truth, the same confidence that, in spite of all opposition, that truth would finally prevail. In all such souls, "patience works experience, and experience hope." Of such and their work we may repeat what Dr. Wayland once said of Howard: "He had marked out his object, and he hastened to its accomplishment with an energy which the limitations of the human mind prevented from being more, and the character of the individual forbade to be less."

To this class of pioneers who open new paths for us, we must now add the name of Dorothea L. Dix, who, after many years of singular usefulness and marked success, has for a long time been waiting, an incurable invalid, for her emancipation from a frame worn out by incessant toil. This summer she passed away.

What, then, was the work which this woman accomplished, which made her a pioneer in our social system?

The direction taken by historical movements and personal achievement often seems determined by what we call an accident. It is said that a flight of parrots was the occasion of North America being settled, not by the English, but by the Spanish race. When Columbus, in his first voyage, was approaching our continent, he was steering north-west, a course which would have landed him on the coast of Florida, from which he and his successors would doubtless have gone north to Chesapeake Bay and the mouth of the Delaware. One of his officers pointed out a flock of parrots flying south-west, suggest-

ing land in that direction, which caused Columbus to change his course, and brought him to the West Indies. Dorothea Dix, coming out of Dr. Lowell's church one Sunday morning, heard two gentlemen speaking of the dreadful condition of the jail at East Cambridge.* She went there early that week, and found, besides the other inmates, thirty insane persons in the most wretched condition, receiving no proper treatment, and shut up in dark, damp cells. After repeated visits, she applied to the Massachusetts legislature, and secured an appropriation for enlarging the State asylum. She had the full sympathy of Dr. Channing, whose parishioner she was, and who befriended her in this work. She next went to Washington, and discovered the condition of the insane there to be also in great need of improvement. She brought the matter to the attention of John Quincy Adams, who secured a bill providing for the care of the insane in that District.

She had now found her work, and made it the chief object of her life. She gave up to its prosecution home, the society of

*The statement as to the incident which was the beginning of the work of Miss Dix is taken from an article in the *Galaxy*, indorsed by herself as giving the most accurate account of her career. As to some points in this article, she made marginal corrections, but did not alter the account of what she heard at Dr. Lowell's church. But, since my discourse was printed, I have received a letter from my friend, Mr. Nichols, of Saco, by which it appears that Miss Dix's attention to the insane was originally directed otherwise. He writes thus: —

"The facts are these, which, though of themselves trivial, are of historic as well as of personal interest: In the distribution of labor among the theological students at the Divinity School in Cambridge, all the women in the East Cambridge House of Correction (twenty in number) were assigned to me. On first meeting with them, I saw that they required not a young man, but a wise and experienced woman for their Sunday-school teacher. I asked my mother if she knew of any one who could tell me of such a woman. She referred me to Miss Dix. After a few moments' thought, Miss Dix said that she would take charge of them herself. I protested in vain that her delicate health would render the task too great. She rejoined, 'At all events, I will be there next Sunday.' She went; and, after an hour in the Sunday-school, she crossed the yard to the jail, where she found a few insane persons confined in rooms where there was no provision for keeping them warm. She applied to the jailer, who told her that they did not need it, and that it would be unsafe. She then appealed in person to the court, which was sitting at East Cambridge, and at length obtained what she desired. After this, she spent an hour every Sunday morning in the Sunday-school; and we left her in the jail. Miss Dix often came to my father's house in Portland, and many are the blessings she left behind and distributed among us. — J. T. G. Nichols."

friends, literature and leisure, all of which she highly valued. Her life was occupied, as long as health remained, in going from State to State and from country to country, her only home being the place where she was at work. She travelled alone, stopped at hotels, declining private hospitality in order to save time. These travels took her to every State in the Union east of the Rocky Mountains, in all of which she visited numerous jails, almshouses, prisons, and insane asylums; and, when she was sure of her facts, she would apply to the legislatures of these States for appropriations for new and better asylums. She would begin by stating the case to members of each legislature, giving them the facts which she had obtained, furnishing them with arguments, and being always at hand to answer questions. With great good sense, she would avoid the language of complaint and reproach common to some reformers. She was not querulous nor impatient, not importunate, but waiting her opportunity, and then left others to carry on the work and to reap the praise. By such methods and such perseverance, she became the means of establishing hospitals for the insane in the nine States of Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, Rhode Island, and New Jersey, besides what she did in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and other places. In 1854, she visited Europe, travelling through England, Ireland, Scotland, and Russia, and meeting Florence Nightingale in the Crimea. In every place, she sought out the jails, prisons, and asylums; and from several foreign governments she procured legislative appropriations for the better care of the insane. She was largely instrumental in establishing the celebrated asylum on the Isle of Jersey. When this measure was before Parliament, a member of that body said it was humiliating that such a much-needed reform should have been suggested by a foreigner, that foreigner a woman, and that woman a Unitarian.

When in Rome, she visited the lunatic asylum, and speaks

thus of her visit and its results: "I did not find sick persons under treatment, but brutes in chains. Several days after this visit, I was presented to the Pope, Pio Nono. He asked me, in a very friendly way, if I had yet visited the asylum in Rome. I had the courage to answer, 'Yes; and I am sure your Holiness has not yet paid it a visit.' Pio Nono quickly raised his head, and asked my meaning by a fixed, expressive look. I related to him, in a voice full of emotion, all the horrors I had witnessed. I ventured, trembling within myself, to express boldly my sense of the unchristian treatment of these unhappy beings. The man who commanded the respect of Christendom listened with earnest attention, and, when I had finished, said briefly, 'Come again in a week's time!' And I left his presence. My anxiety was unutterably great; for the Protestant and stranger had, perhaps, risked too much. Though conscious in my heart of my good intentions, I yet passed a sleepless night and a day of inward agitation. It caused a deep sensation when the Holy Father, two days after, stopped before the gate of the asylum and spent an hour in the building. The week passed, and I again came, as I had been commanded, to the Vatican and the Pope. In a grave and calm tone, Pio Nono said: "I have appointed a commission charged to lay before me a plan for the erection of a lunatic asylum, in conformity with the rules of humanity and morality, and in the shortest time possible. When you visit Rome again, your just and pious wishes will have been fulfilled. I thank you for your communications. May Heaven bless you.'" Certainly, this transaction was an honor both to the infallible Pope, who was willing to be instructed, and to the woman brave enough to offer him the necessary information.

Once, when staying in England at the house of a friend, she told him she must go at once to the Channel Islands, as she heard that a man was about to establish a lunatic asylum there whose license had been taken away in England for his conduct toward the insane. On arriving at the islands, she went to the

Governor and explained the case to him; and the man was immediately removed. She then found that the lunatics in the islands were frightfully mismanaged and neglected, and she went back to the Governor and narrated the facts. He called together the "Assembly of the Notables," who were very proud of the administration of affairs in their islands, and consequently shocked at her statements concerning the treatment of the lunatics. They begged her to explain fully her views of what was necessary, and voted £10,000 toward erecting a suitable asylum for the insane.

Once, in Scotland, while staying with George Combe, the phrenologist, she tried in vain to make any impression on the Lord Advocate concerning the abuses in the Scotch law in regard to the insane. Finding that Sir George Grey, the Home Secretary, was the highest authority in the matter, she went to London, called on him, explained the case in full, and he promised that the needed changes in the law should be made. When the Lord Advocate came to London, he found the whole matter settled in accordance with her views.

The gentleman from whose very interesting letter I have been permitted to take these last two anecdotes says that when he first knew Miss Dix she brought a letter of introduction from Dr. Channing to his father, who was an eminent citizen of Liverpool. He says that at that time she was a poetical young lady, an invalid, who showed no trace of the energy of character which she afterward manifested. On her subsequent visit, when she had achieved such success in her work, he asked her how she had accomplished it. She answered that she went to those whose duty it was to aid in any particular work, and was always sure that, though at first they might refuse to do what she asked, they would gradually become interested, if she could succeed in making them listen, and would end by doing whatever was needed. It was in this way that she induced Mr. Butler, of Providence, to found the well-known Butler Asylum. She was

told that his means were ample, but that he had not been known to contribute largely to any such objects. When she began to talk to him of the need of such an asylum, he wished to change the subject, perhaps regarding her as a mere enthusiast, of whom he had probably seen a large number. Every person reputed to have means comes frequently in contact with such. Miss Dix said: "Mr. Butler, I merely ask the privilege of laying before you the facts in this matter, and then my duty ends. It will depend wholly on yourself to decide what your duty is." Mr. Butler listened, and gradually became more and more interested. At last, he said, "What do you wish me to do?" She said, "I wish you to make yourself happy in this world and the next by giving fifty thousand dollars to found a hospital." He answered, "It shall be done!" showing that he was a conscientious man, ready to do his duty when he saw it. After his death, his heir called on Miss Dix and said that he felt indebted to her for inducing Mr. Butler thus to dispose of a part of the property, and that he was prepared to add twenty-five thousand dollars more for a similar object. Miss Dix suggested that he should buy the adjoining land and lay it out in beautiful grounds, which he did; and the result we have in the admirable Butler Asylum, near Providence.

It is apparent that Miss Dix had faith in human nature, derived, perhaps, from her intimate acquaintance with Dr. Channing and his teaching. She believed that men usually, if made to see their duty clearly, will be likely to do it. It is evident that much of her success depended on this conviction. She went to those whose help she needed in confidence and hope. She showed that she had faith in their good intentions, and this confidence disposed them to do what she wished. It is surely an advantage for reformers and missionaries to put themselves in these relations of sympathy and good-will with those they desire to influence.

She also had a great deal of tact. Her earnest desire to

accomplish her purpose made her very careful in considering the means to be used. Once, in Washington, I found her seated, writing in one of the alcoves of the Congressional Library, where she could easily be found by members who wished to consult her about measures then before Congress in regard to the insane. On that occasion, she happened, in the course of conversation, to tell me this anecdote. She was passing the night at a hotel in Kentucky (I think at Lexington), and was told she was needed immediately; for a gentleman had been brought to the hotel, who was in a high state of delirium, and was so violent that those who brought him were afraid to go near him. "But it is not my business," said she. "It is theirs. They ought to secure him." "They do not know how," was the answer; "but they heard that you were here, and want your help." Miss Dix went down and inquired into the matter, learned that the maniac was of good birth and breeding, and, having made her arrangements, went into the room where he was. He was in the act of dashing a chair against the floor. She went directly up to him and said: "I hear, sir, that you have just arrived from a journey. You must need refreshment. If you will give me your arm, we will go into the next room and have some tea." She took his arm, led him into the tea-room, sat and talked with him continuously, not letting his thoughts go astray; and his instinct of politeness made him behave quietly. After tea, she rose, and said: "I believe you are an invalid. This hotel is not a comfortable place for you. I know a place which is exactly what you need, and where you will have all you want. My carriage is at the door, and we will go there at once." She took him to the carriage, was driven to the asylum, and left him there in good hands.

To how many poor souls must the coming of this good woman have brought an entire change of life! How many have been restored by her efforts from hopeless mental alienation to sanity and health? Once, when she called for her bill

at a hotel in the South, the landlord said, "Miss Dix has no bill to pay here." "But I always pay my own bills," said she. "Miss Dix cannot pay anything here," replied the landlord. She then looked at him, and asked if she had met him before. "You came to the insane asylum where I was confined, and my recovery is largely due to the improvements you caused to be made. You can never pay anything in my house." In how many like cases may she not have delivered those who had none else to help them! When she began her work, the insane were chained in jails and out-houses, and made night hideous by their shrieks and howling. I remember, when a boy, I heard these dreadful sounds from the home of a farmer near by, one of whose sons was thus confined. Some years since, I visited the Butler Asylum, and preached to the lunatics one Sunday evening; and I never saw a more quiet and seemingly attentive audience. There was no appearance of restraint. One old man who sat in front I especially noticed from his animation and interest. After the service, I inquired about him; and the superintendent told me he had been brought to the place in chains. Those who brought him were told to take off the chains, as no chains were allowed in that house. They declared that they were afraid to loose him, lest he should be furious and dangerous. Thereupon, the superintendent himself took off the chains, and by judicious treatment made the man one of the best behaved members of the asylum. Such is the change effected in half a century in the management of asylums for the alienated.

I do not propose to recount all the events of our friend's life, and therefore pass by her work during the Civil War, when during four years she was superintendent of the hospital nurses. I shall say nothing of her being sent for by the Governor-General of Canada, to advise concerning legislative acts for asylums there. She was a very quiet person, never appearing on a platform, doing her work mostly by individual and personal influ-

ence. She received no compensation for her labors; paid her own travelling expenses and hotel bills,—the chief exception being that she passed her last years in the New Jersey Asylum, which she had helped to found, and where rooms were provided for her by the trustees, who invited her to make it her home. Her life shows what may be done by simple concentration of mind, hand, and heart, on one important object. It also shows how essential to success is faith in the power of truth over the human soul, confidence in human nature, and also the conviction that whatever ought to be done can be done.

There is still another lesson to be derived from the life of Miss Dix. The greatest things are done by those who forget themselves in some one great work, and so at last find joy in the work itself. They seek no reward but the satisfaction of accomplishment. Their happiness is to see their work growing from day to day. They waste no time in complaining of neglect or opposition. They are not merely seeking to do their duty, and, having done their part, to leave the rest to others. They are not content to bear witness to the truth, and then leave the result to take care of itself. They work,—not alone from conscience, but from love; they are straitened till the cause is gained and the deed accomplished. The prophets sought to deliver their own soul, and uttered their own testimony, whether men would bear or forbear. But those who are not seeking to deliver their own souls, but to save the bodies and souls of others, are fertile in resource, untiring in effort, unchecked by failure, and do not rest until, by prudence, patience, kindness, wisdom, knowledge of the facts, and confidence in the principle, they compel men to hear. This is the way by which great things are done in this world. And I think that the Master would say of Miss Dix, as he said of another, "Wherever this gospel is preached, what this woman has done shall be spoken of as a memorial of her."

In times like these, when there is so much to distract our

thoughts, such an infinite variety of interesting objects to dissipate our attention, it is all the more necessary to learn to concentrate our aims on some one important purpose. Self-consecration is that which gives unity, content, and value to life. To devote ourselves in heart to some great and useful work, to live resolutely for this, is the essence of Christianity. This does not come of itself: it requires effort, and the sacrifice of personal convenience and of many pleasant pursuits. But it amply repays us with the conviction that our lives are not lived in vain; that we are making progress, day by day, onward and upward. The martyrs now are not always those who are baptized in blood, not those who live in caves or die at the stake. They are often those who do not appear unto man to fast, whose self-denial has no outward sign, who give themselves, not to die for a cause, but to live for it. This is a higher type of martyrdom than even that which illuminated the first ages of Christianity. Men are not now nailed to the cross; but it is still necessary to take up the cross, and to carry it for the cause of the Master. This is the devotion, the self-consecration, which our own day chiefly demands. So we best follow the Master, and find him to be, as Whittier says: —

"No fable old, nor mythic lore,
Nor dream of bards and seers,
No dead fact, stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years,

"But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he,
And faith has yet its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

And every time we can help, ever so little, our brother man, the voice of Jesus says in our heart, "Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

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